

Big Bang Is Not Theory

By AM3 William Allenbaugh

I came to work and found the usual heavy workload. We checked tools in the morning and got started with maintenance. We just had received three new airmen in the shop, and they were tasked with cleaning access panels on aircraft 603. My job was to supervise the new airmen and help clean out the aircraft panels as well. Before the day was done, I could have used some help.

Once we started, we quickly discovered a shortage of cleaning bottles because other shops were cleaning the aircraft, too. Sharing only one spray bottle of alcohol-based cleaner between four people was not good enough, and the bottle soon would be empty. I let the guys continue the job, and I went to find more spray bottles.

I planned to fill bottles with water to flush out the dirt to make our one bottle of cleaner last. I went to the first lieutenant to get some empty spray bottles, but all I found were full bottles of Spray-Nine cleaner. I grabbed two bottles and took them to my shop. Knowing the Spray Nine would run out quickly, I decided to dilute the chemical with a half-bottle of water. I looked for an empty container to pour out half of the Spray Nine. I'd use the rest of it later—that was the plan anyway.

The only thing I could find was my Jolt Cola bottle, which is made of aluminum and has a screw-on type cap. I drank all the cola in the bottle and shook out the remaining drops into the trash. I poured the Spray Nine into the soda bottle and labeled the side of that bottle "Spray Nine, Do Not Drink." I then left the shop to check on the new guys. When I reached the aircraft, they were gone. Knowing the importance of finishing the job, I continued to clean the panels. I was about to use the remainder of the Spray-Nine cleaner that I had left in the shop, when I was told to wrap it up because the next shift was here.

While the supervisors were checking tools, I cleaned up my work area and went to the shop, completely forgetting about the Spray Nine I had left in the soda bottle. The tools were accounted for, and they let us go

A Jolt Cola can isn't the right container for hazmat.



for the day. As we all headed out, I thought everything was OK.

At some point during the night, someone moved the hazmat-filled container near a radio on top of a shelf that was at eye level. The shipmate who moved the bottle said when he opened it; there was a big release of pressure, along with a peculiar odor. Despite this warning, he didn't think it was abnormal. Later that night, when I was home and about to go to sleep, a knock came at the door, and I heard words that no one really wants to hear. They came from an airman who had worked with me on the day shift. He told me that an explosion had occurred at work, and some people were hurt and in the hospital. He also said that I needed to come in right away.

I couldn't believe what I just had heard and almost dismissed it as a joke. He was persistent and explained it was no joke. Even while I was driving back to work, I had a problem believing the situation was real.

When I arrived at work, I found out it was very much true, and a lot of eyes were looking at me! I then got

that sinking feeling and found out my day was getting worse.

After answering a gauntlet of questions, I found out that little soda bottle, which I had thought was harmless, actually had exploded in the shop. It blew up with so much force that it knocked a five-pound radio off the shelf, sprayed hazmat all over the shop, and actually got into mouths, eyes and noses of three people. It barely missed hitting another shipmate in the head when it exploded.

The only good news was that the guys who went to the hospital were OK. In fact, they were back at work the next day.

My pride took a huge hit, but I was thankful no one was injured seriously in this incident. This event is something I never will forget; neither will my shipmates—they remind me regularly.

I learned two valuable lessons: Spray-Nine doesn't have any warning about transferring the chemical into other containers, but anytime you transfer hazmat into a temporary container, it should be an approved one. I hope my near-tragic, big-bang mistake will make others aware of this danger. ☘

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Tire Change Gone Bad



By AD1 David Coffelt

How does a simple tire change become the most embarrassing and potentially deadly mishap in my 15-year career as a flight engineer? The answer is found in one very simple three-letter acronym: ORM (operational risk management) or better yet, the lack of ORM.

A routine four-day NALO mission in our C-130T from the East Coast to the Mediterranean to drop off cargo and personnel seemed like a piece of cake. After the first 10-hour day of flying, we landed in Lajes,

Azores. The following morning, the transient alert sergeant called to tell me that our C-130T was leaning right wing down and a little aft. I immediately thought about the preflight I had done with my trainee before leaving home base. Did I miss something that could have been fixed at that point? After a short ride to the aircraft, we discovered our starboard, aft main-mount tire was flat.

Normally, this situation would not pose a problem. However, we were at an airfield with no tools or parts